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# Birmingham Safe Communities Strategy

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**CLARUS**  
CONSULTING GROUP

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# Part I: Background & Process Overview

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## Background

The Birmingham Safe Neighborhoods Task Force was convened in April 2018, a joint effort between the Office of the Mayor, City of Birmingham and the United States Attorney's Office, Northern District of Alabama, with support from the Jefferson County Health Department to help reduce violence in the City of Birmingham. Its mission is to engage government, nonprofit and corporate citizens in a coordinated and collaborative process to:

- 1) Ensure parity in prevention, enforcement and re-entry
- 2) Strengthen protective factors that prevent criminal behavior and reduce recidivism
- 3) Create a coordinated action plan around prevention and re-entry

In July 2018, recognizing an opportunity to increase capacity and reach across the community by utilizing an outside partner, leadership from the Task Force engaged Clarus Consulting Group to assist with creating a strategy informed by the community to guide its mission. **The resulting Birmingham Safe Communities Strategy found in this document will now be used as a framework for the creation of a coordinated action plan around prevention and re-entry.**

## Strategy Development Process

Over the course of two months, Clarus conducted 14 individual interviews and facilitated 11 focus groups with 107 people to discuss violence prevention and re-entry in the City of Birmingham. Interviews were held with key community leaders, such as the Mayor, Chief of Police, representatives from Birmingham City Schools, philanthropic funders and community activists, to name a few. Focus groups were organized around priority areas identified by the Task Force, including education/literacy, workforce development, domestic violence and sexual assault, mental health and faith and community, among others. While individual interviews were primarily held one-on-one, between 15-20 people were invited to each of the focus groups, with 7-14 attending each in most cases. The list of individual interviewees and information on numbers of focus group participants can be found in **Attachment A** of this document.

Participants were asked questions related to their vision for safe neighborhoods in Birmingham, as well as questions about Birmingham's strengths and challenges, and asked to identify priorities for violence prevention and re-entry. After conducting all interviews and focus groups, Clarus analyzed, synthesized and organized the responses. A table summarizing the stakeholder engagement feedback is included as **Attachment B** of this document.

In November 2018, a small steering committee comprised of members of the Birmingham Safe Neighborhoods Task Force and representatives from the three organizations which created the Task Force convened to discuss the feedback from the stakeholder engagement process. The steering committee provided additional reflection and comment on the input received from the stakeholder engagement process and helped design questions and activities for a second, larger planning session.

The second planning session, held in December 2018, was attended by 40+ participants from the Birmingham Safe Neighborhoods Task Force and other city leadership. Through a series of questions and small group discussions, these individuals helped identify and further define the strategy and components which have become the framework for the Birmingham Safe Neighborhoods Task Force's **Safe Communities Strategy**. Details of the strategy and components are outlined in Part II of this document.

## Organizing Principle

A key issue which emerged from the stakeholder engagement immediately and continuously throughout the project was the **need to engage more residents and community members in the design of the strategy and action plan**. While many residents of the City participated in the stakeholder engagement process, they were often balancing their resident status with the role of the organization they were representing. Nearly every group or interviewee strongly stated their conviction that residents and community members needed to be included in the process to accurately define a plan with authenticity. This also resulted in many conversations about individualized or customized solutions and action plans, and the importance of creating these tailored to each community instead of a “one-size-fits-all” plan for the entire city.

The theme of community voice was so dominant throughout the stakeholder engagement and planning process that it became the organizing principle around which the entire strategy was developed. For this reason, it is of the utmost importance to note that the final deliverable developed in this document is intentionally **a strategy and not an action plan**.

## Next Steps

The Birmingham Safe Communities Strategy outlined in this document should be used as a framework and guide to create a coordinated action plan around violence prevention and re-entry in the City of Birmingham. The **action plan should be developed in conjunction and collaboration with the communities** within the City of Birmingham. Community members will have the richest knowledge about their communities regarding what will and will not work with violence prevention efforts where they live. Approaches and ideas will vary among communities across the City, therefore customized action plans will be necessary to fully address the issues of prevention and re-entry.

## Part II: Strategic Framework

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### Strategy

The overarching goal of the Birmingham Safe Communities Strategy is to promote positive peace. It aims to do this through a community-driven and community-responsive approach, meaning community members' input, ideas and feedback are the primary drivers of the strategy and anything implemented in the strategy should be adapted to best fit individual communities. **This community customization is central to the success and authenticity of the strategy.** Communities should be active players and take ownership of their strategies and plans for positive peace. Finally, the strategy uses a public-health lens to approach prevention and re-entry issues, which includes consideration of the concepts of social justice, health equity and social and ecological determinants of health. Risk and protective factors for violence reduction also heavily influenced this strategy and should be considered in crafting and implementing action plans. The full strategy statement is included below:



### Birmingham Safe Communities Strategy

*Promote positive peace through a community-driven, community-responsive approach to prevention and re-entry using a public health lens*

**Trust** is the largest and most important piece of the Birmingham Safe Communities framework and the foundation needed to advance the strategy. Numerous stakeholders pointed to the lack of trust between residents of the Birmingham community and the systems and partners who serve them and identified the need to **rebuild trust before any further progress can be made**. Trust between systems is often not a destination, but a journey and relationship that continually needs to be tended and maintained over time once a baseline trust has been established.

First and foremost, **leadership at all levels should demonstrate commitment to the Safe Communities Strategy**. As trust is earned over time, it is vitally important for leadership to show immediate, continuous support and commitment to the Safe Communities Strategy. As the vision for the City regarding safe, secure and sustainable communities, the Safe Communities Strategy will be the guide and North Star by which the community measures progress and holds leadership accountable. It is critical to success for the community to see leadership collectively embracing and following the strategy.

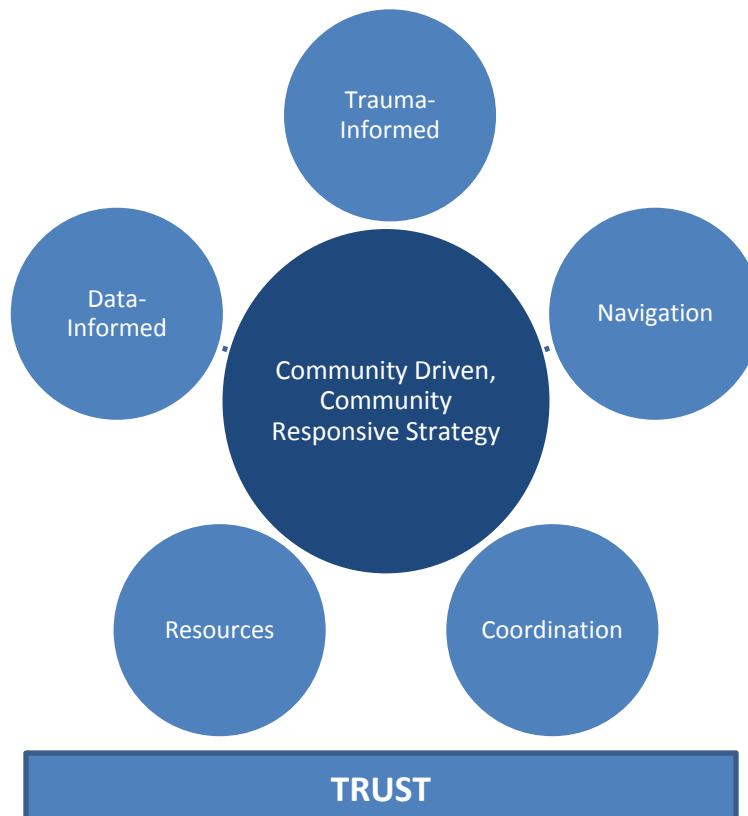
It is important to note that it may be necessary to first **acknowledge harm and mistakes made by systems in the past** for the community to trust and embrace the new Safe Communities Strategy. Efforts towards reconciliation could go a long way in creating buy-in and engagement in the strategy. In order to bring two groups together and move forward with a shared vision, often damage to relationships and barriers from the past first need to be recognized and validated. Systems and institutions, like people, are not perfect and mistakes, however small, can make big impacts on individuals interacting with these systems and institutions. Acknowledging past harm does not mean to re-live old wounds, as some parties may not have even been the direct individuals or systems involved in past ills. However, recognizing the power and magnitude these harms had on community members can be healing and can promote reconciliation in relationships, thereby creating alignment and forward progress.

Additionally, **strategies should be developed to strengthen the relationship between the community and law enforcement specifically**. The lack of trust between the community and law enforcement in the City of Birmingham was repeatedly cited throughout the stakeholder engagement process and has been well documented through other studies and informational interviews. With new leadership in place, now is the time for law enforcement to demonstrate their trustworthiness and for officers to build relationships with individual members of the communities they serve. Birmingham Police Department has identified strategies to engage and communicate more with the communities around prevention and re-entry in an effort to build trust and relationships. These strategies should be supported, and other strategies considered and developed to target increasing trust between these groups.

Another step towards building trust between systems and the community will be for **systems to include consumers in the design, decision-making and delivery of services**. Knowing and seeing “someone like me” who has participated in a service or who helps guide consumers into service interactions from beginning to end goes a long way toward creating trust in the systems serving these individuals. Similarly, **investing time in creating real relationships with individuals** shows sincerity and demonstrates that members of the system value and appreciate the unique members of the community. Both groups should assume the other is coming from a place of good intentions and be willing to show vulnerability to create authentic and genuine relationships.

## Strategy Components

The Safe Communities Strategy has five core components:



### 1. Trauma-Informed

Understanding the high prevalence of trauma in the community, it is essential that the overarching framework be trauma-informed. All system partners should be **encouraged to recognize and respond to the impact of trauma on the individuals they serve**. Programs, agencies and service providers should infuse trauma awareness knowledge and skills into their organizational culture, policies and practice and should address the intersections of trauma with culture, history, race, gender, location, and language. System partners should also acknowledge the impact of structural inequity and be responsive to the unique needs of diverse communities.

### 2. Navigation

The current system of resources and supports is cumbersome and difficult to navigate. **Improving system navigation** is a key component of the Safe Communities Strategy. Barriers to system navigation, as well as strategies for overcoming identified barriers, should be informed by the community.

**Providing more services directly in the communities**, rather than expecting community members to travel to access services, is a core strategy for improving system navigation. Developing policies and

programs that support and incorporate local and grassroots entities is critical to providing more place-based services. The City should help articulate the unique value of grassroots organizations in the successful implementation of a community-driven strategy, and advocate for fair allocation of resources across small and large organizations. It is also of significant importance to help build the capacity of grassroots organizations through technical assistance and support.

**Generating awareness** of supports and services is another important aspect of improved navigation. A first step in increasing awareness is to identify all the organizations doing good work in the community and create a registry of their efforts. Key communication messages and identification of the most effective messengers and modes of communication should then be developed in conjunction with the community. Finally, greater awareness is needed regarding the role of system partners, including improved civic literacy around the role of law enforcement, the court system, and victim's rights.

### 3. Coordination

Improved coordination and collaboration among non-profits, faith-based organizations, the school system and other system partners is another key component of the Safe Communities Strategy. While there are many individuals, organizations, and governmental entities working to prevent violence in the community, efforts are typically siloed, often leading to duplication of efforts and/or service gaps.

**Infrastructure is needed to regularly convene organizations and system partners to improve communication and coordination.** Convenings can be used to develop and share ideas and best practices, brainstorm solutions, and develop effective referrals between organizations. The City and key funders can lead the way by nurturing and incentivizing coalition building among organizations.

### 4. Resources

The City's prevention strategy should help ensure **adequate and effective allocation of resources** for prevention efforts. Efforts should be made to fully understand community needs and target resources to meet those needs. Funding opportunities should be identified and clearly articulated through multiple channels to the community, and funders should be encouraged to look beyond the "usual suspects" to identify organizations and grassroots groups that can be impactful in the community.

### 5. Data-Informed

The best decisions are most often made using clear, reliable data and evidence. As noted above, using a public health lens will include considering data on factors such as health equity, social determinants of health and risk and protective factors. Data should be used to identify need (generally and by community / neighborhood), to map current resources and to guide the development of an action plan. Along with other important factors, data should help **drive programming and funding decisions**, as resources are limited. Data should also be collected and measured to **evaluate impact** such as baselines and benchmarks, etc.

## Part III: Role of the Birmingham Safe Neighborhoods Task Force

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While the Birmingham Safe Communities Strategy was developed by the Safe Neighborhoods Task Force for the City of Birmingham, there are parameters of authority, ownership and feasibility that need to be acknowledged regarding implementation and next steps. The Task Force itself cannot affect change and solve for the entire myriad of factors that contribute to violence in the community, therefore it is vitally important to the success of the strategy and subsequent action plan to clarify what the Task Force can and cannot do. Understanding the limited control of the Task Force, planning session participants offered the following suggestions for how the Task Force can best support implementation of the Safe Communities Strategy:

1. **Convener.** Perhaps the most important role the Task Force can play is as a convener of the many partners that will be key to successful implementation of the Safe Communities Strategy. The planning process served as an important first step in promoting dialogue among Task Force members, building awareness of community organizations and resources, and strengthening trust among partners and between organizations and the community. It should be a priority for the Task Force ongoing to serve as a neutral convener for continuing the important work of collaboration and relationship building in the community.
2. **Communicator.** The Task Force is comprised of over 50 individuals representing government, non-profit organizations and the community at-large. Communication will be a key role for the Task Force, as individual members and the group as a collective should serve as a vehicle for dissemination of information and for feedback from the community including needs and areas of concern. Task Force members can also help educate and achieve buy-in to the concept of promoting positive peace.
3. **Innovator.** The Task Force should foster innovation and the development of creative solutions to complex community problems. Task Force meetings should be an opportunity for open discussion of new ideas and approaches, and the Task Force can serve as a sounding board and resource for strategy development.
4. **Accountability Partner.** Once a detailed Safe Communities Plan is developed, the Task Force can serve as an accountability partner by helping to identify and track indicators of success.

## Part IV: Consultant Recommendations

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The following recommendations are based on Clarus' observations throughout the planning process and are presented for consideration.

1. **Engage the Community Voice.** Community voice is vital to the development and implementation of a successful plan for safe communities. A variety of vehicles should be developed to ensure ongoing dialogue and feedback with the community regarding the development of policies and programs.
2. **Build Trust.** As with community voice, trust is a foundational principle of the strategy. No progress can be made until and unless trust is restored. It takes time to rebuild and re-earn trust, therefore consistency and authenticity in word and action will be the linchpins to the overall success of the strategy.
3. **Consider the Sphere of Influence.** While there is much the City can do to promote positive peace and reduce violence, the City has limited capacity to influence risk factors such as poverty, literacy, mental illness, and abuse / neglect. Exerting the discipline to focus on ideas and initiatives that can be influenced or implemented by the City is difficult, but necessary for success.
4. **Utilize the Birmingham Safe Neighborhoods Task Force.** While new and somewhat unformed, the BSNTF is an impressive collection of individuals and organizations committed to reducing violence in the City of Birmingham. More structure and governance work is needed to maximize the effectiveness of the Task Force, including:
  - Identify / establish a chairperson / leadership for the Task Force
  - Clarify / explicitly state the charge of the Task Force; consider the possible roles of convener, communicator, innovator and accountability partner when developing the Task Force charge
  - Clarify membership (can interested individuals join the Task Force or are members appointed?)
  - Clarify terms of service
  - Clarify frequency of meetings
  - Align meeting agendas with the established charge of the Task Force
  - Clearly communicate decisions-made and next steps at the conclusion of each meeting
5. **Develop a Communication Strategy.** The strategy development process engaged 100+ stakeholders in dialogue about safe communities in the City of Birmingham. The City should develop a communication strategy with key messages to communicate strategy outcomes and continue creating alignment with stakeholders.

6. **Create a Coordinated Action Plan.** The City of Birmingham and Birmingham Safe Neighborhoods Task Force should build on the momentum and energy created through this process to swiftly move forward with the creation of a coordinated action plan. Utilizing the Birmingham Safe Communities Strategy as a framework and gaining input from the community are the tools necessary to create the coordinated action plan.

## Attachment A: Stakeholder Engagement Participants

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPATION		
<i>Stakeholder Group</i>	<i>Number of Participants</i>	<i>Number of Focus Groups</i>
Family Court	11	1
Education & Literacy	7	1
Housing	9	1
Mental Health	9	1
Employment / Workforce Development	7	1
Community & Faith	12	1
Law Enforcement / Judges	7	1
Re-Entry	14	1
Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault	11	1
Youth	11	1
Mayor's Leadership Team	9	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>11</b>
INTERVIEW PARTICIPATION		
<b>Interviews completed:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. J.W. Carpenter, Birmingham Education Foundation</li> <li>2. Josh Carpenter, City of Birmingham</li> <li>3. Dena Dickerson, Offender Alumni Association</li> <li>4. Leesha Ellis-Cox, Child &amp; Adolescent Psychiatrist</li> <li>5. Troy Williams &amp; John Baker, Birmingham City Schools</li> <li>6. John Hilliard, Birmingham City Council</li> <li>7. Max Michael, UAB School of Public Health</li> <li>8. Chris Nanni, Community Foundation</li> <li>9. Sara Newell, United Way</li> <li>10. Patrick Smith, Chief of Police</li> <li>11. Sheila Tyson, Birmingham City Council</li> <li>12. Onoyemi Williams, Faith in Action</li> <li>13. Hunter Williams, Birmingham City Council</li> <li>14. Randall Woodfin, Mayor</li> </ol>		

## Attachment B: Stakeholder Engagement Feedback

<b>VISION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe &amp; clean neighborhoods</li> <li>• Community voice is heard &amp; connectedness among residents</li> <li>• Basic needs met</li> <li>• Program &amp; services available to meet needs if necessary</li> <li>• Education/Literacy focus</li> <li>• Youth focus</li> <li>• Positive relationship with law enforcement</li> </ul>
<b>CHALLENGES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of communication &amp; collaboration among systems and residents</li> <li>• Lack of community voice represented</li> <li>• Basic needs unmet</li> <li>• Service gaps</li> <li>• Trauma/Victimization/Mental Health concerns</li> <li>• Distrust of Birmingham Police Department &amp; Law Enforcement</li> <li>• Prevalence of guns</li> <li>• Re-entry issues</li> <li>• Education/Literacy</li> </ul>
<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Leadership in place (Mayor, DHR, Schools, etc.)</li> <li>• Numerous programs available</li> <li>• Growth / hope mindset of community</li> <li>• Caring Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Know problems and want to help solve</li> <li>– Includes Faith Community</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>PROGRAMMATIC PRIORITIES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth/Prevention</li> <li>• Mental Health/Trauma/Substance Abuse</li> <li>• Education/Literacy</li> <li>• Re-entry</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Workforce Development</li> </ul>
<b>INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY PRIORITIES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainability</li> <li>• Transparency</li> <li>• Accountability</li> <li>• Integrity</li> <li>• Trust</li> </ul>
<b>OPERATIONAL PRIORITIES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Navigation</li> <li>• Coordination</li> <li>• Data System &amp; Data Sharing</li> <li>• Policy</li> </ul>

## Attachment C: 11/28/18 Planning Session #1 Participants

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Organization:</b>
Robin Cope (IMS)	City of Birmingham
T. Marie King	Organizer/Activist
Adrian Fields	HABD
Ericka McNeal	VISTA – City of Birmingham
Ed Fields	Mayor’s Office – City of Birmingham
Peggy Sanford	US Attorney’s Office
Paul Erwin	UAB School of Public Health
Mark Wilson	Jefferson County Department of Health
Stephanie Hicks	Offender Alumni Association
Melissa Niven	Helping Families Initiative – Jeff County DA
Brandon Johnson	City of Birmingham
Jeremy Sherer	USAO
Kacey Keith	Mayor’s Office
Dena Dickerson	Offender Alumni Association
Mosi Deterville-Makori	Mayor’s Office

## Attachment D: 12/13/18 Planning Session #2 Participants

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Organization:</b>
Jay Town	USAO-NDAL
Cedric L. Stevens	Birmingham Police Department
Mark Wilson	JCDH
Jameel Rucker	Alabama Pardons & Parole
Clarence Henderson	Alabama Pardons & Parole
Janine Hunt-Hilliard	Family Court
Melissa Niven	Helping Families - Jeff. Co D.A.
Uche' Bean	City of Birmingham
Mankinta Holloway	Birmingham Municipal Court
Ericka McNeal	Office of Community Engagement
Morrell Ramsey	Making the Transition, Inc.
Keith Strickland	Making the Transition, Inc.
Willie DeLoad	Making the Transition, Inc.
Aman Butler	Making the Transition, Inc.
Julie Wall	One Place Metro ALA Family Justice Center
Sonja Moore	Chosen Girls Rock, Inc.
Adrian Fields	Housing Authority Birmingham District
Tina Reuter	UAB Institute for Human Rights
Brittany Hogan	Empowered to Conquer
Edward T. Bowser	Birmingham Mayor's Office
Peggy Sanford	U.S. Attorney's Office
Melissa Smiley	City of Birmingham
Mosi Makori	City of Birmingham
Bianca Shoulders	Federal Prison System - FCI Aliceville
Larry Ferguson	Growing Kings
Onoyemi Williams	Peacemaker
Myles McKee	Common Thread
Stephanie Hicks	OAA
B.H. Romero	Federal Bureau of Prisons
Sylvia Romero	Retired Bureau of Prisons
Janice M. Blackwell	Birmingham Police Department
Regina Allison	Family Guidance Center of Alabama
Michele Yarbrough	DA's Office
Kristi Bradford	Better Basics
Marcus Massingale	FCI Aliceville, BOP
Kacey Keith	Mayor's Office
Andre D. Sparks	Birmingham Municipal Court
Earl Hilliard Jr.	City of Birmingham / Office of the Mayor